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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/02/2021  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GM](#)  
SUBJECT: NEW GERMAN LEFT PARTY: ONE STEP FORWARD, ONE STEP  
BACK

REF: 05 BERLIN 4131

Classified By: Acting Pol Counselor John Lister. Reason: 1.4(b) and (d)  
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11. (C) Summary. The merger of Germany's two largest leftist parties, the Left Party.PDS and the WASG (Electoral Alternative for Social Justice), is proceeding but with considerable difficulty. The Berlin branch of the WASG appears determined to run against the PDS in fall state elections, despite a national WASG decision against such a step. Divisions between defenders of the old East Germany and modernizers in the PDS are also raising concerns in the predominantly western WASG. Leaders from both parties are pressing hard for the merger, which enjoys strong support in the PDS but is less popular in the WASG. Whether the WASG can enforce national decisions without a schism is unclear. If the effort does succeed, the new Left Party could, once consolidated, pose a political challenge to the SPD. End Summary.

Left Party.PDS: Ideological Divisions Showing  
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12. (C) Latent tension between the PDS rank-and-file, largely made up of ex-members of the old East German Communist Party, and the modernizing leadership have grown in recent weeks as grass roots groups have sought to rehabilitate some aspects of the East German system. These include efforts to present the Stasi as a "normal" intelligence agency and statements by PDS Chairman Emeritus Modrow (the last Communist leader of the East) arguing that West Germany shared responsibility for the wall and the deaths of escapees. The debate on the issue was apparent at the April 29-30 PDS national convention, where Modrow repeated his thesis. Several younger party leaders spoke out strongly against any defense of "Stalinism" or efforts to blame the west for the GDR's human rights violations. MdB Wolfgang Gehrcke acknowledged to the convention that there was a "feeling of division" within the party.

13. (C) Party leaders admitted concern that this debate would harm merger efforts with the WASG. The leader of the PDS in Saxony-Anhalt, Matthias Hoehn, told Embassy representatives the day before the convention that if Modrow were to raise his ideas at the convention it would create problems. Hoehn believed that, although aging Communist cadres have lost permanent influence, they have become more militant in the party -- in part because of unhappiness with the merger process with the predominantly western WASG. Since the convention, media have quoted Axel Troost, a member of the WASG executive, as saying that the debate in the WASG was "not helpful" and "offers no relief" for the merger process.

WASG:

14. (U) The larger problem for the merger comes from the WASG.

That party, originally a protest movement against the Hartz IV and Agenda 2010 reforms, unites a wide spectrum of far-left groups. In eastern Germany, the party is generally quite small and much more radical than in the west. Most notably, the Berlin WASG is dominated by a Trotskyite faction which decided to run against the PDS in state elections in September. The WASG in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (M-VP) has also said it will run against the PDS. Such a step is both a legal and political threat to the merger process and to the united PDS-WASG caucus in the Bundestag. The PDS leadership hoped the WASG would take strong and definitive measures to block the Berlin WASG.

15. (U) At the WASG convention, also held on April 29-30, the focus of debate was the merger and possible disciplinary action against the Berlin and M-VP branches. Party Chairman and MdB Klaus Ernst and Bundestag caucus Chairman Lafontaine spoke passionately in favor of the merger. Ernst said that WASG was doomed to irrelevance otherwise and called on delegates to block the Berlin and M-VP organizations. Heated debate followed in which merger opponents received considerable applause. Delegates voted by a clear though not overwhelming majority of 163-121 to reject the Berlin and M-VP plans, but the resolution's wording was not absolute. The party leadership was authorized "to examine and, if need be, to take all measures in order to make the will of the Convention felt." The decision had two effects. First, that same evening the Berlin WASG leader, Lucy Redler, said that the Berlin would not change its plans. Second, the following morning three members of the WASG national executive resigned their positions in protest. Their resignation statements -- sharply critical of party leader Oscar Lafontaine in particular -- received standing ovations. These and many

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others, including some leaders, spoke out against the exclusion of dissident voices and the use of pressure tactics.

16. (U) The party also approved a pro-merger resolution by the larger majority of 186-107, but that resolution was also conditional. The WASG demanded "parity" in the merger with the much larger Left Party.PDS; said that differences should be "clearly marked" when the two parties failed to agree; and called for leadership rotation and a bar on simultaneously holding functions in the party and in parliament or government. The WASG would like to bring other leftist groups -- particularly globalization critics -- into the merger process. All these conditions/proposals are likely to be difficult for the PDS to accept.

#### Leadership Challenge

17. (C) The leaders of both parties (Gregor Gysi and Lothar Bisky in the Left Party.PDS; Klaus Ernst, Ulrich Maurer and scar Lafontaine in the WASG) are solidly behind the merger project. Gysi and Bisky will have the easier task -- the PDS is more organized, disciplined, and the lower ranks of the leadership also largely share their leaders' views. The PDS rank-and-file also are more disciplined and (perhaps reflecting their SED past) more willing to do their leaders' bidding. Ernst, Maurer, and Lafontaine are at the head of a much more disparate group. Mid-level WASG functionaries have diverse political and professional backgrounds -- there are ex-SPDers, ex-Greens, labor union officials, long-time far-left politicians, and also a number of PDS dissidents in the eastern WASG. The evidence of the just-concluded convention suggests that the leaders probably can bring most of the party into the new Left Party, but only at significant cost in membership and probably also after significant compromise from the PDS.

Comment

18. (C) The future of the WASG is anything but certain. The convention saw a number of personal attacks on the leadership and far-reaching distrust of Bundestag members. The chaotic and tense atmosphere was reminiscent of Germany's Green party in its founding days twenty years ago. With the resignation of three members of the national executive, rumors of a schism are mounting. Nonetheless, we would still say the odds favor a merger in some form -- though the WASG may lose some portion of its clientele in the process. For example, the mass resignation of MdBs from the WASG and their adherence to the PDS has been discussed. If a merger does happen, the new party will certainly require some months or years to consolidate its structures and leadership. For this reason, leaders of both parties have told us the merger must be completed by summer 2007 -- well before the next federal elections and nearly a year before several important state elections in 2008. If the merger is successful, the new Left Party could pose a significant challenge to the SPD by siphoning off left-wing voters. Indeed, this already appears to have taken place in the 2005 Bundestag election. End Comment.  
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